LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 702
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Cup-Bearers of Wine and Hellebore

(A Book of Intellectual Rowdies)

Llewelyn Powys

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NOTE

These essays have already appeared in one or the other of the following publications: The New York Times, The Dial, The Freeman and are printed here with the kind permission of the editors.

DEDICATED TO A. R. ORAGE,

whose intellectual vigour is only surpassed by the goodness of his heart, and whose criticism and appreciation were of such inestimable value to me in the days when I first began writing, sitting under the Catherine Pear-tree, outside the saddle-room at Montacute, in the County of Somerset.

CUP-BEARERS OF WINE AND HELLEBORE

FRANCOIS RABELAIS

Few books have managed to draw into their pages more of the unregenerate body of the earth than have the works of François Rabelais. In truth these exultant and extravagant pages seem writ, as it were, with the actual rank sweat of our planet, with the bitter, salt sweat that for ever rises from the commons and goose-greens of the world, from those commons and goose-greens whose gay levels, for all their buttercups and daisies, are soundly chequered with round, flat, homely cow-pats.

But what perhaps especially separates this good great work from all others is the fact that amid its boisterous joviality, its sly whimsicality, its monumental and monstrous bawdry, one comes continually upon utterances of the gravest and most profound significance. The riotous earth of Rabelais's conception rolls and rollicks it under the still, frosty light of the eternal stars like a coopered barrel of beer tumbled and jogged across the floor of the universe; and scarcely have we found time to register a protest against the acceptance of such jolly friskings, maintaining, as best we may, that life has more in it than just that, when, behold! we hear words spoken above the music of the spheres, above the hum of the

outer darkness, which cause us to discover, with a sense of infinite relief, that, as a matter of fact, nobody understands better than Rabelais the desperate nature of the human situation. And undoubtedly it is this very solicitude about our fate, so vigorous and yet so tender, that to a great extent explains the hold that this work has had upon men's minds for close upon four hundred years.

Rabelais was born near Chinon, and his earliest recollections had to do with the fat, grain-growing, grape-producing fields of Touraine. He knew what it was to keep starlings from the vineyards in springtime; to pick a pannier-full of purple mulberries in August; to thrash a walnut tree in October; and to spend long, drowsy, fireside hours sitting in the great family-kitchen during the winter months. It was doubtless the memory of one such evening, stored away in his mind for years afterwards like a cask of unforgotten wine in a rich cellar, that inspired him to write those mellow sentences which have to do with the home-life of the most good, most royal Grangousier, "who after supper warmeth his b——s by a good clear grate fire, and waiting upon the broiling of some chestnuts is very serious in drawing scratches on the hearth, with a stick burnt at one end, wherewith they did stir up the fire, telling to his wife and the rēst of the family pleasant old stories and tales of former times."

Shut away in a monastery from such happy surroundings when still only a lad, his energy for many years found expression in absorbing the new learning But alas! these pursuits

only led him into trouble. His cell was searched and was found to contain books in that language which the instinct of his ignorant fellow-monks suspected, not altogether unjustly perhaps, as being entirely inimical to the spirit of mediæval Christianity. To understand Greek with its strange, clear-cut, artistic lettering, with its lucid, uninhibited methods of reasoning, there could not but be definite evil in that! But perhaps their eccentric intellectual brother had in other ways provoked their hostility. Certain legends have come down to us concerning Rabelais's conduct at Fontenay-le-Comte which ought to be remembered. Had he not on a certain famous festival played the devil with the lustral water in the chapel-stoups, and with even more malice on another occasion diluted their refectory-wine with some villainous aphrodisiac concoction—that same red wine which they had trodden out in the autumn and had hoped to whiff up in the winter?

Rabelais escaped further persecution at the hands of the Grey brothers by appealing to a higher authority, to no less a person than Pope Clement VII. To use influential personages as so many stalking-horses was a practice which in later life he reduced to a fine art. Until the day of his death he was content to remain a sly assailant of obscurantism, ambushed behind this or that formal potentate. It is clear he had no predilection for the stake. On every side he saw men being burnt alive for their opinions. "Now God forbid," he cried, "that I should die this death! for I am by nature sufficiently dry

already without heating myself any further." And between Catholics and Protestants he had a hard enough time of it to keep a whole skin on his back. Orthodox churchmen would always have been glad to lay hands on him, while Robert Estienne from his refuge at John Calvin's side kept inveighing against "the theologians of Paris for not burning Rabelais, the atheist."

What then does Rabelais, this great modern ancient, teach? Above everything a courageous acceptance of existence for its own sake. He is no mincing idealist. He loves the hurly-burly, the large, brutal transactions of life. He feels no misgivings. He accepts the hungry, carnivorous world as he finds it, full of "jolly pugs and well-mouthed wenches," full of "excellent godebillios of the dun ox (you know with the black streak)" and monstrous mares of "burnt sorrel hue" with "slouch ears, like the goats in Languedoc." He likes a world in which there are forests "most horribly fertile and copious in dorflies, hornets and wasps," and where "a pair of breeches is not so easily got; I have experience of it"; and yet at the same time where a man may sit an hour or two "at Innocents the pastry cook over against the painted wine shop at Chinon," or go to mass with a thick-covered breviary weighing heavy with its grease and clasps, or visit the kitchen "to see what roast meat is on the spit," or "pass through certain meadows, or grassy places to behold the trees and plants," or, when night is full, look out of the castle window "to see the face of the sky."

He is intolerant of all that is false and artificial. A goose-step education, an education that is narrow, insular and standardized, exists he declares, "but to bastardize good and noble spirits and to corrupt all the flower of youth"; better to follow the good Gargantua's example than to allow the natural philosophic temper of one's mind to be spoiled by the adhesion of so many false, stereotyped and dead ideas; better in fact to study "some paltry half-hour with eyes fixed upon a book but with one's mind in the kitchen," and then go "to see a coney ferrited or caught in a gin . . . or to lie tumbling in some fair meadow, unnestling of sparrows, taking of quails, and fishing for frogs and crabs."

Hypocrites of every cast are as bitter to Rabelais's taste as the pilgrims in his salad were to Gargantua. Of doctors he says, "a hundred devils leap into my body if there are not more old drunkards than old physicians." As for monks, "the very shadow of the steeple of an abbey," he declares, "is fruitful." Picrochole, who is used by him as the exact prototype of an evil michief-making monarch, he is content to leave as a "common porter at Lyons as testy and pettish in humor as ever he was before." "These devilish kings which we have," he says, "are but as so many calves; they know nothing and are good for nothing but to do a thousand mischiefs to their poor subjects, and to trouble all the world with war for their unjust and detestable pleasure."

He is opposed to all that is mean, small,

conventional; to the proprieties which are invented to restrain and hold back the free and frank expression of natural emotion.

"Never trust those men that always peep out at one hole."

"Nor can there be any greater dotage in the world than for one to guide and direct his courses by the sound of a bell, and not by his own judgment and direction."

The fact is that there is more in these works than Mr. John Sumner and the rest of the "rabble of great pocky loggerheads" who clamor against them are able to discern. Nobody can write of Our Lord with more devotion than can Rabelais when he is so disposed. Consider Friar John's stout words as he sipped his wine. "O how good is God, that gives us of this excellent juice! I call him to witness, if I had been in the time of Jesus Christ, I would have kept him from being taken by the Jews in the garden of Olivet. And the devil fail me, if I should have failed to cut off the hams of those gentlemen-apostles who ran away so basely after they had well supped, and left their good master in the lurch."

What passage in all literature could be found more truly religious than Pantagruel's explanation of that mysterious cry, "Pan is dead," which was heard over the waves of the Mediterranean at the time that Tiberius Cæsar sat upon the Imperial throne! Coming as it does in the very midst of such vast, grotesque, gorbellied merriment, it strikes one to the heart as might some graceful, magnanimous bene-

diction heard unexpectedly from the lips of an heroic drunkard. We are laughing all of us "like a swarm of flies," and suddenly we find ourselves listening to this fine, ironic tribute to that most incredible and desperate of man's fancies which conceives as possible that the son of God actually in very truth came down to visit the high roads, the farmyards, the pantries of the earth, from beyond the familiar aura of the moon, from beyond the wide expanses of our solar system, from beyond the outer borders of the cold constellations.

For my part I understand it of that great Saviour of the faithful who was shamefully put to death at Jerusalem by the envy and wickedness of the doctors, priests and monks of the Mosaic law. . . . He is the good Pan. . . . At his death, complaints, sighs, fears and lamentations were spread through the whole fabric of the Universe, whether heavens, land, sea or hell. The time also concurs with this interpretation of mine; for this most good, most mighty Pan, our only Saviour, died near Jerusalem during the reign of Tiberius Cæsar. Pantagruel, having ended his discourse, remained silent and full of contemplation. A little while after we saw the tears flow out of his eyes as big as ostrich's eggs.

But quite apart from Rabelais's attitude toward Christianity, his mood with regard to all philosophic speculations seems to be penetrated with the profoundest wisdom of the ages. Panurge in referring to the heroes says, "May I never be damned if I was not so much a lobcock as to believe they had been immortal, like so many fine angels." To which Pantagruel answers with sublime and noble simplicity, "I

believe that all intellectual souls are exempted from Atropos's scissors."

Indeed, so strong is the underswirl of enigmatic revelation throughout these pages that one comes almost to believe that this wayward, sophisticated French monk was in some especial way conversant with the hidden secrets of the universe:

"Fate leads the willing and the unwilling draws."

"All things tend to their end."

"Good hope lies at the bottom."

Finally, in full recognition of the treacherous nature of all theological conceptions, he commits his readers through the mouth of the Priestess Bacbuc into the almighty protection "of that Intellectual sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere."

How we would like to have had an authentic glimpse of the old man during those last years when he was officiating as parish priest in the village near Paris! Did he also, like the honest schoolman, confess at last that he had finished with argumentations and had come to that pass when he "wanted nothing but a cup of good wine, a good bed, my back to the fire, my belly to the table, and a good deep dish"? It may well have been so, for he had passed through many dangers and up to the last must have felt himself fortunate in that he escaped the fate of Euclion's cock, "which cock, for having by his scraping uncovered a treasure, had his neck twisted round." From certain legendary

accounts of his death, it would seem that he accepted that last experience with characteristic equanimity; and indeed who would dare to assert that there has ever lived an intellectual spirit more worthy "to receive the gentlest, the deserved, the last kind embraces of the great Alma Mater, the earth"?

JONATHAN SWIFT

It is very certain that there never has lived a man who would have made a better subject for a psycho-analyst than Jonathan Swift, the ferocious, splenetic, and impotent Dean, of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.

Proud with an inordinate pride, cynically frank and yet pestered by strange and unaccountable inhibitions, the "mad parson" lived out his long life, dependent upon human beings and yet disdainful of them, attracted by the crazy drama of existence and yet at the same time out of conceit with it. Small wonder that the anomalies and contradictions of such a character should have captivated the minds of succeeding generations for nearly two hundred years! Was this man, the savagery of whose glance was actually potent enough to kill, the mere victim of some morbid physical derangement; or did the madness that fell upon him at last owe its origin to a deeper and more terrible cause? It is really possible that one glimpse into the ghastly secret designs of life is sufficient to shatter, in certain abnormally sensitive temperaments, those delicately adjusted cerebral nerves which distinguish mortal men from the beasts of the field? When we remember the fate of Pascal, of Nietzsche, of Guy de Maupassant, each one of them gifted with just this dangerous, penetrating insight, our hearts quail lest this indeed be so.

With that irony which was characteristic of him, Swift himself affected to attribute his malady to a simple enough cause, to nothing else, in fact, than a youthful surfeit of golden pippins.

"Dropped in Ireland by a perfect accident" he was educated at Dublin University, his expenses being borne by his uncle Godwin, an eminent lawyer, whose benevolence did not save him from the hot tongue of his tetchy nephew who in his autobiographical notes gravely declares him to have been "a little too dexterous in the subtler parts of the law." Swift's mind in those days, as he himself tells us, "was like a conjured spirit which would do mischief if I did not give it employment."

From Dublin he went to Moor Park at Surrey as a secretary to Sir William Temple. His *locus standi* in this capacity was at first ill-defined and one can well imagine the anguish that the youth's haughty spirit underwent—already racked with the travail of genius—at finding himself in the position of an upper servant in the well-appointed country house of a pompous English gentleman. A cold, distant look from Sir William was sufficient, so Swift tells us, to put him at odds with himself for days together. In such an atmosphere, stiff, formal, and correct, the youthful satellite was at pains to exercise an ironic submission that ate into his very soul. It was as though a leopard were being fed on lettuce in a rabbit-hutch, or a vulture on groundsel seed in a parrot's cage.

It was a habit of his to relieve the constraint

from which he suffered by rushing off at top speed, whenever occasion offered, to the summit of a neighboring hill. There was only one congenial spirit in that conventional community, a little girl, probably a bastard daughter of Sir William Temple. Something about the sprightly personality of this child thawed the "chilly temper" of the awkward tutor. They were together always, in the cool, spacious library, in the stately oak-paneled hall, and in the ornate stone summer houses of the well ordered garden. "From those hours," as has been so well said, "the child and man went hand in hand into the eternity of sorrowful fame."

It was not, however, only the companionship of Stella which relieved the tedium and ignominy of those days; for it was Swift's custom to make periodical visits to his mother, walking, hedge-stick in hand, all the way from Surrey to Leicester. During these excursions he would sleep at the poorest ale-houses, paying sixpence for clean sheets and, in order the more to taste and relish the precious hours of his freedom, would hold familiar intercourse with the human riffraff which is ever to be found up and down the English turnpike roads. In after years he put such experiences to good use, and it may well be that his peculiar style of writing, at once restrained and outspoken, owes much of its vigor to the curious juxtaposition in which he found himself between ministers of State and hedge rogues. We know that William III as he strolled along the trim borders of Sir William Temple's kitchen gar-

den expressed his liking for the young secretary by instructing him about the cutting of asparagus after the Dutch manner; may we not also conclude that the eccentric youth picked up from the acquaintanceships that he made on his Majesty's highways, other scraps of information equally pertinent to life? Just as at Sir William's board, he was in a position to observe at first hand the foibles and vanities of the great, so on many a sunny settle throughout the midland shires of England he was a constant witness of the grosser peculiarities of the rude and baseborn.

Sir William Temple died in 1699 and Swift, who had already taken orders, now entered upon that career of political pamphleteering which eventually won for him so exceptional a position in the history of those times.

In his "Battle of the Books" he had already showed unmistakable indications of his power. Could there be, for example, a more humorously graphic description of the sentiments of a testy spider disturbed by the foundering movements of a bee entangled in its web?

> 'A plague split you,' said he, 'for a giddy son of a whore. Is it you with a vengeance that have made this litter here? Could not you look before you, and be damned? Do you think I have nothing better to do, in the Devil's name, but mend and repair after your arse?'

This work was followed by the "Tale of a Tub," that extraordinary, profane and sceptical piece of writing in which it would seem that Swift wittingly offended against his own maxim that "the want of a belief is a defect which

ought to be concealed when it can not be overcome." Under the guise of the elder brother Peter he directs his rancorous ridicule against the Roman Catholic Church with all its nice regulations for human conduct. Peter it was who insisted that brothers Martin and Jack—the Church of England and the dissenters—must "by no means break wind at both ends together, without manifest occasion." Even the divine consolation of the holy sacrament is treated with the utmost irreverence as a "remedy for the worms, especially those of the spleen"; and in reference to the perennial dispute concerning transubstantiation he makes the eldest brother roundly assert that the sacred wafer itself, far from being merely bread is "as true natural mutton as any to be had in Leadenhall Market."

In spite of such literary conceits, however, Swift. remained throughout his life a zealous champion of the Church of England as by law established. It was chiefly for its sake that he came to play the part of a turncoat and left the Whigs for the Torys, through whose patronage he won for himself the Deanship of St. Patrick's, Dublin.

Once safely installed in his deanery he lived in Ireland, "like a poisoned rat in a hole," the plague and scourge of all tyrants and at the last the bitter, misanthropic censor of the whole human race. "Gulliver's Travels" even he tells us, was written "to vex rather than divert the world"; and this we can readily believe when we read passages such as the one describing the infant Yahoo, "I observed the

young animal's flesh to smell very rank and the stink was somewhat between a weasel and a fox, but more disagreeable."

Perhaps it would be best, in order to fully acquaint the reader with his temper, to gather together a few haphazard quotations from his works.

I love only individuals, I hate and detest that animal called man.

When a true genius appears in this world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.

The merriest countenances are in mourning-coaches.

No wise man ever wished to be younger.

A very little wit is valued in a woman, as we are pleased with a few words spoken plain by a parrot.

It is said of the horses in the vision that their power is in their mouths and in their tails. What is said of horses in the vision, in reality may be said of women.

What a fund of nice and curious observation is revealed in his scandalous "Directions to Servants." How these outrageous sentences seem at once to get under the lid of the decorous indelicacies of society, opening them wide, so to speak, to the sanative influence of light and air. Such "unconfined humor" has upon it the very stamp and signature of the man who is described as never laughing but "sucking in his cheeks to prevent it" when such a mood was upon him.

Rules that Concern All Servants in General.

When your master or lady calls a servant by name, if that servant be not in the way, none of you are to answer, for then there would be no end to your drudgery. Never come till you have

been called three or four times; for nought but dogs will come at the first whistle; and when the master calls 'who's there?' no servant is bound to come. 'Who's there' is no name.

Directions to the Nurse.

If you happen to let the child fall and lame it, be sure never confess it, if it dies all is safe.

. . . . to the House Maid.

When you have scoured the brasses and irons in the parlour-chimney, lay the foul wet clout on the next chair that your Lady may see that you have not neglected your work.

His poetry is just as unpardonable, revealing a propensity to expose everything, to gnaw down to the very bone. Probably Dryden was right when he said, "Cousin Swift, you will never make a poet," and yet these rhyming, facile verses will always possess a curious fascination for certain minds, for they express, in poetry that is no poetry, a morbid reaction to the visible world. Was his incipient sickness revealing itself already in his tabid preoccupation with the excremental? Only a madman surely could make such giddy sport with dung and litter! Or is this fetid, but at the same time strangely formal poetry merely the outcome of a spiritual sensitiveness recoiling with inexpressible bitterness from an ideal of beauty which does not bear too close an inspection?

It is, however, in his prose that one finds Swift's real power. How often when injustice is rampant in the world and nothing said, have lovers of liberty envied that inimitable style, whose searing quality of venomous satire could not only dislodge the mighty from their seats, but alter the very laws of the land!

Throughout what we may call the militant years of Jonathan Swift's life, Stella was not the only young girl who, in the words of Dr. Johnson "from being proud of his praise grew fond of his person." In following his life it becomes apparent that there was something in the morbid construction of his uncommon temperament that enabled him to derive a wanton and perverted satisfaction from mental intercourse with immature women. Both in his journals to Stella and in his letters to Vanessa this curious preoccupation is quite evident. It was this denaturalized and extraordinary man's vice to make love not with his body but with his genius. This perilous pastime became a kind of obsession with him, an obsession which perhaps alone reconciled him to an existence for which as the years passed his distaste became more and more emphasized. His love letters are all written in ambiguous and masked language as though he half anticipated the fierce searchlight of inquiry that would be poured upon their pages by future generations. "Farewell, dear Sirrahs, dearest lives; there is peace and quiet with M D and nowhere else."

Esther Vanhomrigh, as the other Esther had done before her, followed her equivocal lover to Ireland only to discover that she was conjured to practise the utmost discretion with regard to the amphibolous relationship. "You have taught me to distinguish and now you leave me miserable," she wrote reproaching the Dean for his judicious abstentions.

Stella took alarm at the presence of a rival and managed to persuade Swift into marrying

her, but even her triumph proved elusive for the Dean insisted upon the ceremony being performed with such rigid secrecy that to this day there are to be found those who hold to the opinion that it never took place at all.

Everybody knows what followed. Vanessa, distressed by a rumour of the wedding, wrote to Stella to have the matter cleared up. When the impolitic epistle was put into Swift's hands, he rode in a fit of blind rage to Marlay Abbey. He reached the place in the early morning and, going straight up to the bed-room of the unhappy woman, threw the incriminating document at her feet and turned on his heel without a word. A week later Vanessa was dead and underground, killed, so it was said, by the single venomous, asp like look that her ferocious lover had given her.

There are other equally strange stories connected with him. One of the most significant of these is recounted by Delaney. On one occasion he saw the Dean hurrying away from Archbishop King to whom he had been speaking. "You have just met the most unhappy man who ever lived," was the only comment vouchsafed by the circumspect prelate. What it was that had been said or confessed during that historic conversation has never been divulged. But whatever horrible thing was hagriding the unfortunate man, worse was to follow.

In January 1732, Stella died. She was buried at midnight in the Cathedral. Swift was too ill to be present; and indeed had to be carried to the back of the deanery so as not to be

distracted into a frenzy by the lights that shone into his room from the lanterns of those who were occupied in putting into church-yard mould the body of the only woman he had ever loved. From that hour he never lifted "his sorry head" in mirth again. A blank and hopeless gloom wrapped itself about him. The record of those years is one of the most terrible episodes in all literary history. Never for a moment was he unaware of his impending doom. He knew that he would inevitably go mad.

He was observed one day standing under an elm tree the top branches of which were already fading. "I shall be like that; I shall die first at the top," he said. Once, when a heavy glass had fallen from its place nearly crushing him, and he was congratulated on his escape, he remarked simply, "I wish it had killed me." A servant passing near his room overheard the words of a desperate prayer, "that he should be taken away from the evil to come."

On the anniversaries of his birthday, when all Ireland was agog to do honour to the author of the "Drapier's Letters," and "A Modest Proposal," he would sit quietly at home and read the third chapter of the book of Job, wherein that ancient, long-suffering Jew curses the day on which he was born. Already he began to feel a change coming over him. "Good God! what a genius I had when I wrote that book!" he said once, as he turned over the pages of the "Tale of a Tub." But worse was to follow.

An abscess as large as a hen's egg formed

over his left eye, and for a month the aging man howled out to the night in abject torment. Five servants could hardly prevent him from tearing out his own eyeball, and when the agony had passed he was left a lunatic. But was he? Occasionally, in spite of the strange aphasia by which he was afflicted, he would be heard to mutter words which to the awe of those who loved him seemed to denote that even yet, in some obscure way, he retained a ghastly and incredible consciousness.

More years passed by and still up and down the wide staircase and through the silent rooms of the deanery the figure that had been Jonathan Swift paced to and fro. Like a caged animal he ate his food—little chopped up pieces of meat—as he walked, and once he was found, with horrible contorted face, threatening his own image in one of the tall mirrors. Once his cousin called to see him. "Go, go," he shrieked, and then pointing significantly to his head, "My best understanding." Once there escaped from him the simple tragic words, "I am a fool"; and this from the lips of the man whom Addison had not hesitated to call the greatest genius of his age! Once more the devoted populace, as his birthday came round, lit bonfires, and paraded the streets, and rang the Dublin bells. The noise of their rejoicing came in through the open window and, to the dismay of the attendants, the idiot inmate uttered the words, "'Tis folly. better let it alone." At another time a knife was left within his reach, and he who removed it was shocked to hear as though in rebuke for

his own prudent action, the ambiguous and impressive utterance, "I am what I am."

He died in his seventy-eighth year, October 19, 1745. He lies buried in his own cathedral near the grave of Esther Johnson. Amongst the letters that he left, as though he wished even after death to bewilder the over-curious concerning the true significance of the deepest emotions of his life, was found an envelope containing one of Stella's tresses, "black as a raven's wing," with the four words, "only a woman's hair" inscribed upon it.

His worldly goods were left by his will for the construction of a mad house.

MATTHEW PRIOR

Matthew Prior was undoubtedly one of the principal precursors of the Augustan age of English poetry; however, born as he was in 1664, his lighter verses are redeemed somewhat from the tedious classical anaesthesia that we associate with the eighteenth century by the fact that they still carry with them a suggestion of the delightful sophisticated levity which belonged to the Caroline epoch.

Matthew Prior, so we are assured by Dr. Johnson, was "one of those that have burst out from an obscure original to great eminence." Whether or not the ancient county of Dorset is justified in claiming Wimborne Minster as the place of his actual birth, it is clear that it was from the immediate vicinity of that old-world country town that his progenitors sprang. Indeed it is within the memory of our own generation that the last of the family, Martha Prior, daughter of a simple shepherd, died at Godmanston.

The first authentic glimpse we get of the young poet is as a wine carrier in his uncle's tavern in London. It was here that Lord Dorset discovered him, Horace in hand, and with that generous munificence, so characteristic of the restoration, paid for his schooling at Westminster and later for his entrance to St. John's College, Cambridge. Matthew Prior it is quite evident made the best of his opportunities. He

had a good "sense of direction," if we may be permitted to use that invidious modern phrase, and cultivated with the utmost zeal useful friendships. In London during the vacations he sought the company of the wits and was one of those who frequented Wills' Coffee-House and who during the long drawn-out evenings of the late summer would sit on the balcony of that famous resort "proud to dip a finger and thumb into Mr. Dryden's snuff box." This privilege, however, in no way prevented him from cleverly parodying in his City Mouse and Country Mouse the famous pro-Catholic poem of the Poet Laureate. It was, in fact, upon this undergraduate exercise that his future career was founded. He became secretary to the Ambassador at the Hague and, because of a series of chances, remained for several years as England's chief representative "at this central cogwheel of the cumbrous engine" of the Coalition.

From a pecuniary point of view the berth was not as satisfactory as it might have been, and Prior's letters from now on are filled with fretful references to the inadequacy of the Government's payment of twenty shillings a day with an allowance for "reasonable extraordinaries." He was never tired of deploring the fact that his creditors, as he put it, "were brisker in business than the Treasury." "Who has ever heard," he exclaimed, "of a professed panegyric poet that was able to advance two guineas to the public?" In vain he pointed out to the preoccupied authorities at home "that a little house, this winter, would be convenient

in so cold a country as Holland." His agitated pleas were greeted with evasions and procrastinations and the poet-diplomatist was left "to scramble at ordinaries with Switzers or French Protestants." One of his own poems suggests, however, that his time was not entirely occupied with his ambassadorial duties. He too had, we may assume, as well as another, his margins, his moments, his golden week-ends when it mattered not a rush to him whether or no the "disaffected" reached the shores of England.

"In a little Dutch-chaise on a Saturday night
On my left hand my Horace, a Nymph on my right."

As the years passed his financial straits were considerably relieved by a sinecure secretaryship in Dublin, from which he drew for several years, though never setting foot in Ireland, remuneration to the tune of nearly £1,000 a year.

From the Hague he was eventually transferred to Paris. His letters from that capital are full of entertaining gossipy information. He was shown over the royal palace and as he viewed Le Brun's gorgeous pictures representing the victories of Louis XIV was asked whether Hampton Court could be said to rival such a display. "The monuments of my master's actions," he replied appositely enough, "are to be seen everywhere but in his own house." He visited the court of the exiled King of England and though the account he gives of that fallen monarch was not exactly

in the best of taste it has its own interest: "I faced old James the other day at St. Cloud. Vive Guillaume! You never saw such a strange figure as the old bully is, lean, worn and riv'led."

On his return to England he abandons his friends the Whigs and turns Tory, actually for a short time gaining a seat in the House of Commons, for which act of treachery, on the death of Queen Anne and the return of the opposition, he is held in custody for two years and is, so he fancies, in no small danger of losing his life.

But even so he is still full of resource. He conceives the fortunate idea of issuing a "tall folio" of his poems done on "paper imperial and the largest in England." He manages to interest innumerable people in his project: Jonathan Swift even exerts himself and extracts not less than £200 from what he called the "hedge country" of his residence. The volumes are sold for two guineas each and Matthew Prior is soon rewarded by having four thousand pounds in his fob and this with an equal sum which he owed to the generosity of Lord Oxford and with the money due to him from his fellowship at John's ensures the poet "his bread and butter at the last." And yet when one looks over this famous collection of poems how few of them seem to us at this later date worthy of preservation. How weary one grows of his Cupids and Chloes and how truly gross and artificial so many of his poems appear! Their only redeeming quality lies, it would seem, in a certain airy amorousness

which sometimes, but by no means always, carries with it a happy distinctive tone derived, we may perhaps be justified in surmising, from those wanton digressions in his private life which were to be afterwards so deplored by Samuel Johnson. For there can be small doubt that this "ambassador of meane extraction" as Queen Anne used to call him, this "creature" of Dorset's, was extremely addicted to the pursuit of the not altogether intangible delights which come to those who indulge in what the Elizabethans were wont to name as the pastime of "wenching."

Mat Prior was in fact a most incorrigible amorist. He would spend an evening with Oxford, Bolingbroke, Pope, and Swift and then go off gay and incontinent to this or that little midnight drab.

"Fair Thames she haunts, and every neighbouring grove
Sacred to soft recess, and gentle love."

"So when I am wearied with wandering all day
To thee, my delight, in the evening I come:
No matter what beauties I saw in my way;
They were but my visits, but thou art my home."

However much one may regret in his poems the presence of a certain note of hard artificial and insensitive cynicism, one cannot but accede that he is able in his own facile way better almost than any other English poet to indicate the unwisdom of putting too high a value upon the ungenerous temptation of inordinate chastity. The iniquity of thus capriciously damming up one of the main streams of human happiness seems to have lodged it-

self very firmly in this Dorset man's brain. And he was at pains to whisper his perilous convictions into the pretty conch-like ears of every young girl he had to do with.

"Never fancy time's before you,
Youth, believe me, will away;
Then alas! who will adore you
Or to wrinkles tribute pay.

All the swains on you attending
Show how much your charms deserve;
But, miser-like, for fear of spending,
You amidst your plenty starve.

While a thousand freer lasses,
Who their youth and charms employ,
Though your beauty theirs surpasses,
Live in far more perfect Joy."

His frolic philosophy shows scant respect even towards the state of Holy Matrimony. It would seem that his profligate mind could find an excuse to justify the most reprehensible indulgence. His reasoning on this head cannot but be painful reading for married ears! What home would be safe if punishment were made to fit the crime at this rate?

"Since we your husband daily see
So jealous out of season
Phyllis, let you and I agree
To make him so with reason."

But it would be a mistake to think that Matthew Prior was altogether incapable of writing in a more moral vein. His book of poems ends with the epitaph he composed for the tomb of Sir Thomas Powys.

"Here lies Sir Thomas Powys Knight. . . .

What by example he taught throughout his life
At his death he recommended to his family and friends:
'To fear God, and live uprightly'
Let who ever reads this stone
Be wise, and be instructed."

It is, however, unlikely that the author of the inscription, gave, if the truth were known, very much attention to this death bed exhortation, any more, with shame be it spoken, than does up to the present time the author of this Essay—the humblest and least punctilious of the large and graceless brood which owes its existence to the pious and potent loins of the Knight of Lilford Hall.

"To the grave with the dead
And the living to the bread."

With the money he derived from his book and with the gift of the house in Essex that he had from Lord Oxford, Matthew Prior proposed to spend the last years of his life happily enough. He had grown a little deaf for no other reason, as he explained, than that "he had not thought of taking care of his ears, while not sure of his head." But apparently this slight physical handicap in no way interfered with his relish for life. We hear of him planting quincunxes in the garden of his manor, or spending long happy months at Wimple, Oxford's country seat, delighted as much by the grace of the little Lady Margaret as he had before been by the manners "wild as colt untam'd" of the high-spirited Kitty,

afterward to become the famous Duchess of Queensbury whom Beau Nash is said to have treated so roughly and who living to the latter end of the eighteenth century died, at last, characteristically enough, from a surfeit of cherries!

It was at Wimple that Matthew Prior himself ended his life on September 18, 1721. His will was found to contain a legacy to a woman whom Dr. Johnson does not hesitate to describe as "a despicable drab of the lowest species."

In a letter written at the time we read:

"I find poor Prior's will makes noise in town much to his disadvantage. Some malicious fellows have had the curiosity to go and inquire of the ale-house woman what sort of conversation Prior had with her. The ungrateful strumpet is very free of telling it and gives such accounts as affords much diversion."

Also from Arbuthnot we get a suggestive glimpse of this side of the poet's life, which was, after all, so singularly removed from the stately quincunxes, round which on August evenings "My noble, lovely little Peggy" was wont to play and trip it. "We are to have a bowl of punch at Bessy Cox's. She would fain have put it upon Lewis that she was his Emma; she owned Flanders Jane was his Chloe."

Matthew Prior had long had Westminster Abbey "in his eye" and in the end he indulged "a last piece of human vanity" by bequeathing five hundred pounds towards the erection of

the preposterous monument which now stands above his grave.

The actual place of his burial is at the feet of Edmund Spenser in the poet's corner.

It must be confessed there appears something curiously incongruous about a trick of fortune which could cause the wanton paramour of Mistress Besse Cox to lie down in the dust, head to heel, with none other than the fastidious author of the Faerie Queene.

WILLIAM COWPER

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days:
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind.

It is not for nothing that William Cowper is so often associated in our memory with the particular animal which delighted him more than any other. From the day if his birth to the day of his death his plight was curiously similar to that of a hunted hare. In his case, however, the flight, the desperate agony, the tragic climax, was by no means contained in the brief hours of a mud-splashed January afternoon, for it was the awful destiny of this sensitive and polished gentleman, of this elegant partial hermaphrodite, to hear for no less than sixty-nine years, unmistakably upon the midnight wind, the sound of "The Hound of Heaven" following close at his heels.

He heard it as a schoolboy crossing the churchyard of St. Margaret's; he heard it in his chambers at the Inner Temple above "the sound of waters passing only into pails and pitchers"; he heard it in the sweet seclusion of Olney "upon the southern side of the slant hills" and louder and even louder he heard it during the last terrible years of exile in East Anglia.

William Cowper was born at Great Berkamstead in Hertfordshire on Nov. 26, 1731. His father was the rector of the village and also chaplain to George II. His mother, whose maiden

name had been Donne, belonged to the same family as the famous Dean of St. Paul's. While still but a child Cowper was sent to a boarding school, where he fell under the evil persecution of an older boy. So deeply did the personality of this bully impress itself upon the nerves of the young poet that he never dared to look at him above the knees, and, as he himself tells us, "knew him by his shoe buckles better than by anything else." From this school he went to Westminster. Was it, one wonders, some half-conscious premonition of the terrible fate that the future had in store for him which as a boy led him to pay a visit to Bedlam, whose ghastly chamber in those days stood open for the morbid curiosity of the public? The good Hanoverian chaplain appears to have entertained no suspicion of the nature of his son's temperament, for we learn that he at this time gravely put into his hands a treatise on suicide for the purpose of receiving the opinion of his eldest son on that academic question.

Only a few years were to intervene before William Cowper, whatever his judgment may have been upon the philosophical aspects of this problem, was to make a serious attempt to put the precepts of the dissertation into practical use. Terrified beyond reason by certain contingencies which might require him to appear in public, he deliberately tried to kill himself by means of his garters and his chamber door.

Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror and rising up in despair.

It was his first attack of actual madness, and he was taken to an asylum. Obsessed by the delusion that he was damned, he remained in this place for two years. His brother, John Cowper, came to visit him, but his sympathetic reasoning got for its pains only one answer: "O brother, I am damned- Think of eternity and then think what it is to be damned!"

On being released from confinement he went to live near Cambridge, and it was during this time that he attached himself to the household of a retired clergyman called Unwin. Shortly after this the good man, his host, was thrown from his horse and killed, and the haunted poet for the rest of his life continued to live under the same roof with the widow, Mary Unwin.

Under the influence of the Rev. John Newton, that "old African blasphemer," as he loved to call himself, the family moved to Olney. There can be no doubt that close proximity to this converted ex-slave trader did William Cowper little good. They saw a great deal of each other. They attended prayer meetings, visited the sick, and collaborated in composing the Olney hymns. And what hymns those of William Cowper are! Some of them as liquid and beautiful as the songs heard from the lips of a shepherd boy in a shadowy fern-grown glade of the delectable mountains:

> Hark, my soul! It is the Lord;
> 'Tis thy Saviour, hear His word;

and others, alas! marred by the primordial savageries of a crude and debased theology:

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

John Newton had already earned a reputation for "preaching people mad!" And indeed it would seem that such achievements filled him with no slight complacence. "Near a dozen gracious people," he tells us, "became disordered in their heads" after listening to his winged words. With such a man at his elbow, what chance, we may well ask, had William Cowper? In the year 1773 he was once more insane, and from then till the day of his death nothing was able to remove his fixed conviction that he had been uttterly and finally abandoned by God to the irrevocable doom of eternal perdition.

Damned below Judas, more abhorred than he was,
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master!

So deep-set had this terrible delusion now become that he even denied himself the solace of prayer, deeming that to one in his extreme case it was useless, nay, blasphemous, to attend church or even so much as to say a grace over his daily bread.

And so we come to that long period of Cowper's life which is so familiar to the literary world—the period when the strange, obsessed poet diverted himself "under the point of a sword suspended by a hair" by composing those verses which have made his name famous. Everything was done that could be done to draw his attention away from his sombre, spiritual preoccupations. His friends presented him with tame hares and he spent

his hours in building hutches for these long-eared sensitive creatures, which in the evenings would gambol on the parlor carpet. But even as he watched them at their playful antics he would hear that pursuant voice, "Cowper, you are damned! Cowper, you are damned!" He walked abroad, he chatted, he laughed, he helped to wind Mary Unwin's balls of thread; during the warmer months he would spend long hours in a summer-house, "not much bigger than a sedan chair," and on mild Winter afternoons would take shelter in a greenhouse, the glass of which was covered with mats. But go where he might, hide where he might, those sensitive ears under the quaint cambric muslin cap were aware of sounds by no means easily to be confused with the murmur of bees in mignonette or the chirruping of birds in leafy trees.

There is in truth something almost ghastly in contemplating the spectacle of William Cowper playing spillikins or battledore and shuttlecock with Lady Austin in the face of such preoccupations. It is to Lady Austin, of course, that we owe some of his finest verse, and his talent for poetry at its best is a very high quality. In these long, rambling productions wherein, as Mr. Robert Lynd has so admirably said, Cowper's music progresses "as a snail of imagination laboring under a heavy shell of eloquence," one comes upon passages in which the poet in a manner quite peculiar to himself makes immortal certain scenes of nature. All that he looked upon in his afternoon walks by the side of Mrs. Unwin, all that he noticed as he drove abroad in Lady Has-

keth's carriage, found its place sooner or later in his poetry. And so close was his observation, and so genuine his power of appreciation, that something of the thrill that came to him upon those far-off excursions is still conveyed to us. Many of his country vignettes have in them the burden out of which unique and authentic poetry is made. With what consummate skill he can make us see those country roads about Olney, which to him had become so familiar! The very farm wains he etches in:

and he that stalks
In ponderous boots beside his reeking team.

How by a few inimitable touches he can conjure up before our eyes the look of the Winter landscape, made strange by the first fall of snow, with its few single dead grasses or "bents" still showing above the white surface and indeed made "conspicuous" now by being "fledged with icy feathers."

The cattle mourn in corners where the fence
Screens them, and seem half-petrified to sleep
In unrecumbent sadness.

We follow his steps up a long arched avenue and share his pleasure in watching the quick movements of a Winter robin—

Pleased with his solitude, and flitting light
From spray to spray, wher'er he rests he shakes
From many a twig the pendant drops of ice
That tinkle in the withered leaves below.

The reappearance of his cousin, Lady Hasketh, into his life was undoubtedly of the greatest advantage to Cowper. This excellent woman did all that was in her power to en-

liven the poet's days. She persuaded the singular household to move from Olney to Weston Underwood and encouraged its two inmates to enjoy such harmless pleasures as were provided by the society of the neighborhood. William Cowper had inherited from his forefathers the manners and easy grace of a well-bred gentleman, and now that fame had come to him his cousin was evidently anxious that he should cut something of a figure in Olney. Commenting upon his clothes at this time, the poet says: "Green and buff are colors in which I am oftener seen than any others, and are become almost as natural to me as to a parrot." The Rev. John Newton was not a little put out by this sudden change in his friend's manner of life. "I find," he wrote, "after all my supposed acquaintance with the human heart there are windings and depths in it of which I know no more than of the dark, unfathomable caves of the ocean," and he never penned a truer word. One feels in entire sympathy with the good sense of Lady Hasketh when she declared, in explanation of her cousin's sadness, "The eternal praying and preaching were too much." As a matter of fact, the Rev. John Newton need have felt no misgiving. Cowper remained still the helpless quarry of the Hound of Heaven, though he disguised himself never so cleverly by "associating with gay people, wearing a green coat and becoming an archer."

In 1787 he tried once more to commit suicide. In superstitious awe he would await the appearance of each new moon and the yearly return of his black month—the month of Jan-

uary. Little enough it availed him to write verses to a dead bullfinch when the following morning he would awake in tremulous apprehension with this line from Milton ringing in his ears:

The wonted roar is up amid the woods.

In 1791 a fresh disaster overtook him. Mrs. Unwin had a paralytic stroke, "Oh, Mr. Cowper, don't let me fall!" came the frightened cry as he stood one morning at his desk in his parlor. The seizure had an unexpected effect upon the behavior of this woman, "more polite than a Duchess." From thenceforth, instead of feeling concern for the comfort of the aging and demented poet, Mary Unwin became more and more exacting in her querulous demands upon his attention. His work, his walks, his diversions had each in turn to be abandoned, until every hour of his day was occupied in looking after her slightest wish and whim.

The strain became too much. Again his hallucinations took audible form. He heard voices. With questionable veracity a stone in the wall called out, "I am God." And once at midnight he listened to this mysterious and baleful utterance, "He shall eat eleven days longer or thereabout."

At last he was persuaded by his kinsman, "Johnny of Norfolk," to leave Weston and travel to East Anglia. John Baily alludes to this drastic change in the poet's life as "a last heroic service rendered to him by his cousin." The wisdom and kindness of the move have always seemed dubious. "Johnny of Norfolk"

happened to be a progenitor of the present writer, and even as a child he remembers noting the strangely unimaginative look of the good man's features as represented in a family portrait. It is incredible to believe that so spruce and bepowdered an individual should have been able to understand the difficult and delicate nature of the obligations he was undertaking. There is evidence that the ailing poet resented the change. A few days before he left he wrote on a window shutter of his home the following words:

> Farewell, dear scenes, forever closed to me;
> Oh, for what sorrows must I now exchange ye?

Once in Norfolk, under the care of his energetic kinsman, things went from bad to worse. The few remaining letters penned by Cowper hit one to the heart. He recognized in the wayside grass of the Norfolk lanes the same herbs that he had so often gathered for his pet birds and is reminded of that long interim of years when he was at least *half-happy*. He writes to Lady Hesketh:

> Oh, that there could be pity, or if not that, at least forbearance, for the most forlorn of all men! Such I am, and expect to be in a condition worse than such tomorrow. Farewell—W. C.

Mrs. Unwin was slowly dying and the poet knew it. "Sally, is there life above-stairs?" he asked the maidservant on the morning before the end came. When told of her death he persisted in declaring that she was not "actually dead," but it was easy enough to dislodge any delusion upon that score by simply showing him the face of the woman who had been his constant companion for so many years.

With one shrill, wild cry the nightcapped hermaphrodite turned from the bedside, never to mention her name again.

Slowly the years passed, with William Cowper sitting "still and silent as a stone." Terrible indeed must have been the thoughts that passed through that diseased brain! Once more he heard voices; and to counteract their influence "Johnny of Norfolk," a man of infinite resource, had tubes let into that silent chamber, little tin tubes, through which he caused to have piped words of comfort in attempted emulation of the awful voice of God!

The end approached. They asked him how he felt. "I feel," answered William Cowper, "unutterable despair." On his deathbed they brought him a cordial, but he waved it aside. "What can it signify?"

It is satisfactory to learn that in the opinion of my great-grandfather, when at length at liberty to scrutinize the corpse, there rested upon the dead poet's face an expression of "holy surprise."

Cowper was buried at East Dereham. A month before his death for one short interval his poetic genius returned to him and taking pen in hand he wrote "The Castaway." Even to this day the terrible and tragic lines of this tremendous poem trouble our imaginations. What a cry is here! What an appalling cry!

No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatched from all effectual aid,
We perished, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.

JAMES THOMSON

The attitude of forlorn despair which finds perpetual recurrence in the minds of certain types of human beings when they come to look beneath the surface of existence, has never, perhaps, been given more complete and final expression than in the poetry of James Thomson. There remains indeed nothing further to be said, for this unfortunate man has found it in him to curse the womb that bare him and the paps which he has sucked and to outface God and go down into the pit at last with his terrible avowals still unretracted.

James Thomson was born in 1834, of Scots parentage. His father was a sea-captain, and a man apparently as capable of holding his own against the storms of the Atlantic as was his son against those other more terrible gales that beat in upon him from eternity. For six days, we are told, the master of the good ship "Eliza Stewart" never left the bridge; stood there, in fact, until carried below broken and paralyzed; and up to the very last year of his tragic life his son may be said to have remained at his post with no less resolution.

James Thomson was trained to be an army school master. At the age of eighteen, while quartered at Ballincollig, in Cork, he fell in love with a young girl named Matilda Wella. After he had known her for two years she died; a calamity of which the full and bitter consciousness remained with Thomson for a

quarter of a century. There is scarcely one of his poems that has not some allusion to this child, and in the end, when the awful history of his days was at last concluded, a lock of her hair was buried with him.

In Ireland, he also met Charles Bradlaugh who, having already got into trouble for his free-thinking views, had enlisted as a common trooper. When Bradlaugh was on sentry duty it was Thomson's custom to walk by his side, and one gets an interesting picture of these two men who were destined to become so famous, discoursing philosophy under the summer stars.

In 1862, Thomson was expelled from the service for a slight breach of military discipline. For the next five years he lived in London in the house of Charles Bradlaugh, earning his livelihood as best he could by office work and journalism. This period was in all probability the happiest of his life. With his friend to satisfy his craving for companionship, and Hypatia and Alice Bradlaugh to satisfy his more sentimental affections, he would seem to have attained to some measure of contentment. In the evenings, he would tell stories to the children or sit smoking with their father, and on Sundays and holidays the whole party would often go out for excursions or perhaps walk together to the grave of Charles Lamb.

It was now that his poems began to appear in the *National Reformer*. Many of them are marred by that same tone of forced jocularity which spoils his letters. Now and again, however, they are excellent, as, for example, the

one entitled "l'Ancien Régime," the bitter, satyrical quality of which is altogether characteristic of his temper.

> Who has a thing to bring
> For a gift to our Lord the King?
> A harlot brought him her flesh,
> Her lusts, and the manifold mesh
> Of her wiles, intervolved with caprice;
> Harlotry's just the thing
> To bring as a gift for our King.

Thomson made at this time two expeditions out of England, one to America as the secretary to some mining corporation in Colorado, and one to Spain as a correspondent for the New York *World*. The latter enterprise proved a complete failure: sufficient copy was not forthcoming. Soon after his return a quarrel with Bradlaugh threw him once for all upon his own resources and he became for the rest of his life what is known as a "single-room bachelor" in the East End of London.

> There were thousands and thousands of human kind
> In this desert of brick and stone:
> But some were deaf and some were blind,
> And he was there alone.

Closed up in one small room, as it were in a cage, he dragged out the rest of his life, day by day.

The publication in 1874, of his masterpiece "The City of Dreadful Night," brought him into contact with several of the more discerning men of letters of the day. George Meredith, Philip Bourke Marston, W. M. Rossetti, Emerson and Longfellow all recognized its value. He sent copies of it to Thomas Carlyle and George Eliot, no comment, however, being

evoked from the former old curmudgeon, though the ethical-minded novelist was considerate enough to write a letter to him in which she expressed the hope "that a mind informed with so much passionate energy would soon produce works with a wide embrace of human fellowship in them."

Slowly the dull years passed by with penury, disappointment and insomnia as his three constant companions. At certain periods he would endeavour to drown in alcohol the misery of his weary and jaded mind, but it was only to return to his sordid surroundings, after the bout was over, in a fit of even greater depression. That people could ever think of time as passing swiftly was to James Thomson incomprehensible—

> This Time which crawleth like a monstrous snake
> Wounded and slow and very venomous;

From his diaries we get a devastating insight into the dreariness of his life, into the agony that too often, alas! in this world besets an imaginative and sensitive nature submerged in commonplace surroundings. Day followed day in uneventful melancholy procession, and each was as like to each in its neutral tone as one dull English penny is to another. From his walks along the depressing streets of London, he would return to his lodging house, would open the dreary house-door and, passing through the tiny hall, smelling of today's cooking, yesterday's gas, and innumerable forgotten inmates, stumble up the dark stairway to be confronted at last by the same books, the same dirty and hateful litter that he had left so

short a time before. It is no wonder that references to the weather play so important a part in these journals, references to the visibility or invisibility of sun or moon, those two free luminaries that moved above his head with so large and tranquil an assurance.

Bitter easterly. Some sun. Aftn. walk about Soho. (bought coal-scuttle; after three years!) Moon keen as crystal, sky pale and cloudless, stars few and dim, ground like iron, wind like a razor.

. . . Cold slight snow; fine morning, livid day. Snowing pretty heavily at night (9 p. m.). Picked just twenty-one sticks out of my grate, the rest being quite enough to light the fire.

Nov. 2nd, 1874. Forty years old to-day. Cold; third day of fog. Congenial natal weather.

It was at this time that James Thomson wrote that curious poem called "In the Room."

The afternoon has grown late and still the curtains of the apartment remain undrawn,

> And nimble mice slept, wearied out
> With such a double night's uproar;

At last in the silent dimness the very furniture becomes articulate! The mirror, the cupboard and finally the bed, speak!

> I know when men are good or bad,
> When well or ill, he slowly said;
> When sad or glad, when sane or mad,
> And when they sleep alive or dead.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The bed went on, 'This man who lies
> Upon me now is stark and cold;
> He will not any more arise,
> And do the things he did of old.'

But envisage his release as he might in imaginative verse, James Thomson's life still dragged on, dragged on, with all the horrible tenacity of some wretched animal whose spine

is broken and yet does not die. His insomnia grew worse, but still he survived,

> Feeling the hands of the Infernal Powers
> Heavy upon me for enormous ill.

In his ghastly poem to insomnia he describes with intolerable vividness, the nerve-tortured state of one to whose brain even the solace of sleep is denied; as if he alone, James Thomson, ex-army schoolmaster, had been selected by some incredible and malign causality to bear the burden of an immortal consciousness when all other men had rest.

> I heard the sounding of the midnight hour;
> The others one by one had left the room,
> In certain assurance that the gracious power
> Of sleep's fine alchemy would bless the gloom.
> . . . . . .
> But I with infinite weariness outworn,
> Haggard with endless nights unblessed by sleep,
> Ravaged by thoughts unutterably forlorn,
> Plunged in despairs unfathomably deep,
> Went cold and pale and trembling with affright
> Into the desert vastitude of Night
> Arid and wild and black.
> . . . . . .
> How I got through I know not, faint as death;
> And then I had to climb the awful scarp,
> . . . . . .
> Perspiring with faint chills instead of heat,
> Trembling, and bleeding hands and knees and feet;
> Falling, to rise anew;
> Until, with lamentable toil and travel
> Upon the ridge of arid sand and gravel
> I lay supine half-dead and heard the bells chime two.

Towards the end of his life he was occupied in writing certain literary essays, selecting, curiously enough, amongst other writers no less a subject than Walt Whitman, whose poetry at

that time was little known in England. There is something extremely affecting in this appreciation of the great American avoucher written by the hand of the man who of all others was the most unhappy. Might it really have been possible, had the two ever met, that the great, life-giving, life-accepting heart of Walt Whitman would have had vigour enough in its ample aplomb to fortify and sustain the darkened spirit of the London poet? At any rate, one experiences a strange sensation, as of miraculous help arriving suddenly in a situation of desperate need, when one comes upon a quotation of this kind in an article by Thomson:

Let the physicians and priest go home
I seize the descending man, and raise him with resistless will.
O despairer, here is my neck:
By God! you shall not go down! Hang your whole weight upon me.
I dilate you with tremendous breath—I buoy you up;
Every room of the house I fill with armed force,
Lovers of me; bafflers of the graves.

It would be a mistake, however, to regard Thomson as a spiritual weakling. He was not that. Rather, like Dante's proud Italian, damned for ever in the blackest abyss of Hell, he raises his hand in blasphemous imprecation against Almighty God. "Take it, God, for it is at thee that I aim it."

"The City of Dreadful Night" contains passages of extraordinary and appalling power. But, as James Thomson himself declared, its appeal is likely always to be limited.

If any care for the weak words here written,
It must be some one desolate, Fate-smitten,
Whose faith and hope are dead, and who would die.

The conception of the poem, with its sombre imagery, is terrific. The world in which we live is likened to a vast, doomed city which lifts its "mass enorm" in the centre of an arid desert. The city is enveloped in a dim penumbra through the nebulous light of which street-lights burn obscurely. "Amidst the sounding solitudes," "ranged mansions" overshadow everything, "still as tombs" where

Myriads of habitants are ever sleeping,
Or dead, or fled from nameless pestilence!

Along the darkened sidewalks of this tremendous and awful metropolis, James Thomson makes his way, following close upon another figure "because he seemed to walk with an intent."

As I came through the desert, thus it was,
As I came through the desert.

How the reiteration of those famous lines beats in upon the brain after a while, like the regular treading, appalling in its heavy monotony, of hostile feet on a pavement outside one's door:

As I came through the desert, thus it was
As I came through the desert . . .
But I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

In the resonant alleys along which they go they see

worn faces that look deaf and blind
Like tragic masks of stone. With weary tread,
Each wrapt in his own doom, they wander, wander,
Or sit foredone and desolately ponder
Through sleepless hours with heavy drooping head.

They glimpse a thousand evil things ominous and dreadful.

After a hundred steps I grew aware
Of something crawling in a lane below;
It seemed a wounded creature prostrate there
That sobbed with pangs in making progress slow,
The hind limbs stretched to push, the fore limbs then
To drag.

The thing looked up, and behold it was a man:

Long grey unreverened locks befouled with mire.
A haggard filthy face with bloodshot eyes,
An infamy for manhood to behold.

At last they draw near to a vast cathedral whose portentous sculptured mass, shadowed far up in the cold, limitless darkness of the night, overlooks a moonlit, cloistral lawn across the wide expanse of which dim crowds of wavering phantom citizens are hurrying. The two travellers enter with the throng, and there in the vast, hollow, many-aisled sanctuary, with tinted moonbeams slanting down through the high mullioned windows, they await the Preacher. Suddenly a voice goes echoing through the vaulted tracery.

And I have searched the heights and depth, the scope
Of all our Universe, with desperate hope
To find some solace for your wild unrest.
And now at last authentic word I bring,
Witnessed by every dead and living thing;
Good tidings of great joy for you, for all:
There is no God; no Fiend with names divine
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

I find no hint throughout the Universe
Of good or ill, of blessings or of curse;
I find alone Necessity Supreme;

With infinite Mystery, abysmal dark,
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark
For us the flitting shadows of a dream.

The world rolls round for ever like a mill;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

This little life is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy peace is ever sure,
We fall asleep and never wake again.

As the years passed, James Thomson's melancholy grew deeper and deeper. Dejected, poverty-stricken, unrecognized, he still tramped the streets, and still from his bed in his lodging house stared blankly into an ultimate void. In the beginning of the year 1882, something seems to have given way in him at last and, fully cognizant of what he was doing, he deliberately set about to drink himself to death. He was thrown out into the streets by his landlord. Again and again with a strange dogged determination he tried to force his way into the miserable abode which, after all, was the only home he knew. "I must have a roof over my head."

Four months passed by and he was still alive. It is known that he spent some part of the time in jail; for the rest, he drifted about in the purlieus of Wapping-Old-Stairs and The Isle of Dogs. Most of his friends lost sight of him. A few of them saw him at rare intervals, and always from his finely moulded head, furrowed now with deep lines, his blue eyes looked out with abject defiance. On one occasion he was seen in a tavern, dressed in mud-stained, ragged clothes. He was wearing a pair of carpet slippers, through the broken

soles of which his naked feet were clearly visible.

Then suddenly he appeared in the rooms of Philip Bourke Marston, the blind poet. Although Marston could not see his guest there was something about his wild speech that filled the blind man with terrible misgivings. Fortunately, William Sharp, the critic, happened to come in later in the afternoon. He found Thomson lying on Marston's bed, in a pool of blood, almost unconscious. He had the sick man conveyed to the London University Hospital where, it is said, he lay for a long time on the bare bench of the common waiting-room until the house physician found time to attend to him. What, exactly, were Thomson's last words has never been divulged. It has been hinted that they were such as to cause even his friends to look askance. "I shall get out of here on Monday, even if it's in my coffin" was one sentence shrieked out by the frenzied man who could not die. His words proved happily true. On the following Monday he, the atheist, theophobist, life hater, found rest at last for his "homeless mind," in a good hour, under six feet of honest earth. No religious service was said over his grave. Free at length from

> Infections of unutterable sadness,
> Infections of incalculable madness,
> Infections of incurable despair,

he was simply put under ground, "unhouseled, unanneal'd," cursed alike by man and God, a renegade and outcast who had been denied everything in the world except genius.

PADRAIC COLUM

It has been given to few writers of verse to express the mood of the land of their birth with an accent as autochthonous as that of Mr. Padraic Colum. It is not for nothing that this shy and delicate poet derives his family name from the most Irish of Irish saints and singers who himself most wonderfully, more than a thousand years ago, struck the very same note that delights us today in Mr. Colum's poetry. For as the holy Columcille looked back from his small craft of skins and branches at the green fields of Ireland growing more and more indistinct behind him, it is said that the sound of his singing was heard far and wide over the cold, drab-coloured waves of the northern sea:

> How swift is the speed of my coracle;
> Its stem towards Derry.
> I grieve at my errand o'er the noble sea
> Traveling to Alba of the Ravens.
> A grey eye looks back to Erin
> A grey eye full of tears.

It is just this same quality, so heightened, so imaginative and yet so convincingly realistic "with its turn for style, its turn for melancholy, and its turn for natural magic," that we find in Padraic Colum's verse. For all the bewildering effrontery displayed by certain Celtic adventurers in the realm of Saxon literature, for all the dash and intellectual brilliance, for instance, of men like Burke, Sheridan, Moore, Wilde, and Shaw, it is not to them that we look

for the true articulate expression of the sad soul of Ireland. We must turn to the ancient Catholic singers, to the country ballad-makers, to the vague, wistful, half-expressed romanticism of poets like Francis Mahony, James Clarence Mangan, W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge and Padraic Colum, if we are to catch the wild, doleful music which the wandering west winds of the Atlantic awaken in the whin bushes and lone moorland trees of the dedicated and tragic Island.

Mr. Colum was born and brought up in one of the middle counties, and his spirit has been permeated with the very thrill of this articulation. His imagination is the imagination of the incorrigible and wilful people who have retained throughout history so strange an attitude to the bleak illusions which occupy, in so rigid a manner, the attention and interests of the rest of the world.

From the earliest times, the Irish have been irresistibly attracted by those half-uttered secrets of the earth's margins which a chance phrase or unexpected word in Celtic literature seems often so nearly to reveal. Above everything these "amorous Gaedhils" are impressionable to what *can not be spoken;* to the inconstant, tremulous, spiritual messages that come to us with retrospection; to the indefinable, provocative calls, sad voices from lost worlds, as it were, that are brought to us each year with the passing of the seasons; to the incoherent evocations that emanate from certain localities or objects whose forlorn identity when once observed can never be forgotten.

It is indeed fitting enough that Padraic Colum should have called the one slim, precious volume he has given us "Wild Earth." No more adequate title could possibly have been selected. Wild Earth!—in these poems one finds the dew of a thousand early mornings, drawn forth by the yellow sun from our wanton planet which after a million dancing æons remains to this day proud, and hard, and "wild," and never entirely "broken for corn."

Everything Mr. Colum writes has its peculiar interest. In a single illuminating sentence he has done much to elucidate the mysterious power of the most perplexing work of genius that has appeared in modern times. Of "Ulysses" he says: "James Joyce does not write savagely, he writes satanically, and his satire touches not individuals and institutions but life itself!" Again and again in Padraic Colum's plays one comes upon passages which bear the stamp of his sensitive and fastidious genius. Take this quotation:

> The people have to watch
> The black rain and it falling all the day.

And again,

> God's will is set
> Against us all; it is against
> The cattle in the field, and it was they
> Stood by his crib; they're moaning always now
> He has forgotten them.

In the mere use of the simple words "black rain," what a fresh, unsophisticated approach to the manifestations of the visible world is revealed; and in the second quotation what a winnowed, sensitive delicacy, so Celtic, so

Catholic, is suggested by the "long long thoughts" which could conceive of a deity being laid under some kind of magnanimous obligation to the beasts of the field for no other reason, forsooth, than that they had been the mute spectators of the birth of a god! It is, indeed, this "fresh approach" which gives to Mr. Colum's books written for children the clear, lucid tone which makes each of them, in its way, a perfect work of art. They seem always to be the narrations of one who has experienced something or seen something for the first time. In truth, to the eye of a poet, what matter that a thousand ages have passed since the world's crust first cooled? Are not men, birds, animals, and flowers, created every hour, incredible and exultant, from the mysterious, fecund breathing of the nostrils of God?

How evasively and unpretentiously Padraic Colum conveys to us the poetry of life; lines, and even single words of his, brushing against our intelligence with the surprise and softness of a linnet's wings. What a rich harvest of impressions his poet's nature must have gathered in those days of his youth—the homely, simple look of white geese against a peat stack, the cottage interior with its shrine and corn bin, the "lonesome hush" of a deserted country road, "the fire-seed sleeping deep in white ashes"!

But valuable though his other contributions to literature are, it is to his poetry that one returns, time and again, when one wishes for the particular refreshment that in certain moods he alone can give us. Has he, one won-

ders, in his poem entitled "The Poet" presented us with a valuable clue by which to explain his power?

'The blackbird's nest, in the briar,
The sea-gulls' nests on the ground
They are nests, and they're more than nests' he said
'They are tokens I have found.'

. . . . . .

'But close to the ground are they reared
The wings that take widest way,
And the birds that sing best in the wood,' he said,
'Are bred with their breasts to the clay.'

The poems of "Wild Earth" do in very fact remind one of the direct appeal of the familiar European blackbird with its liquid, flute-like song; but they also have in them something else, something unutterable, unaccountable, melancholy, which one might well associate with a different bird. Continually, as we read, we are startled by a note plaintive and intractable as the whistle of a curlew coming to us on the wind, in fitful intervals, from some far-off, desolate moorland.

The crows still fly to that wood, and out of the wood she comes
Carrying her load of sticks, a little less now than before,
Her strength being less; she bends as the hoar rush bends in the wind.

. . . . . .

And then, between daybreak and dark,
And between the hill and the sea,
Three Women, come down from the Mountain,
Will raise the Keen over me.

. . . . . .

Och! but I'm weary of mist and dark,
And roads where there's never a house nor bush,
And tired I am of bog and road,
And the crying wind and the lonesome hush!

Hidden away in many of his poems side by side with this haunting feeling of bane, one comes upon an extraordinary suggestion of those unexplained emotions which for want of a better word we call romantic. Perhaps what I mean will also best be illustrated by quoting from certain poems.

To Meath of the pastures,
From wet hills by the sea,
Through Leitrim and Longford,
Go my cattle and me.

I hear in the darkness
Their slipping and breathing—
I name them the bye-ways
They're to pass without heeding;

Then the wet, winding roads,
Brown bogs with black water;
And my thoughts on white ships
And the King o' Spain's daughter.

We hear it again in

Mavourneen is going
From me and from you,
Where Mary will fold him
With mantle of blue!

From reek of the smoke
And cold of the floor,
And the peering of things
Across the half-door.

Or in,

She'll hear my boat on the shingles,
And she'll hear my step on the land,
And the corncrake hid in the meadow
Will tell her I'm at hand!

But it may very well be that in its ultimate essence what constitutes the chief value of Padraic Colum's work is the faculty he pos-

sesses for calling up before our eyes the peculiar characteristics of the native Irish, characteristics so simple and yet so imaginative, lingering on even yet, in the more out of the way districts of their country-side. In his writings we hear once more the exact intonation of the fiddlers and the wavering voices of the harp-players who for generations have gone wailing through each white washed hovel, and whose wandering footprints have been mingled for centuries with the webbed indentures of ganders and ducks which mark each muddy bohereen. Again and yet again we catch the echoes of their doleful exclamations, Och! Ochone! or hear the reiterate murmur of their ranns and quaint benedictions.

I save the seed of fire to-night,
Even so may Christ save me,

On the top of the house let Mary
In the middle let Bridget be.

These are the people whose hearts for so many centuries have been entrammelled with a perilous love for their dark Rosaleen with "her holy delicate white hands."

The priests are on the ocean green
They march along the deep.
There's wine from the royal Pope,
Upon the ocean green;

These are the people who "went forth to war, but always fell" and who to this day cherish deep in their hearts a proud contempt for the "creeping Saxon."

Not forgetting Saxon faith
Not forgetting Norman scath
Not forgetting William's word
Not forgetting Cromwell's sword

From Cruckmoylinn to Carricknabauna, from Glen Nefin to Leitrim, they have eaten "the scrape of hog's lard" and looked upon the three most desolate things in the world, and yet have retained throughout the worst period of their agony a "deep affection and recollection" for the tragic soul of their country whose memory in retrospect ever haunts their minds.

> In the old, old days, upon Innish,
> The fields were lucky and bright,

But possibly in one single poem of three verses Padraic Colum has succeeded more than in any other in giving perfect expression to his feeling not only for the romance and beauty that he finds in innocent, homely things but also for the silent glamour of nature in her most entranced and lambent moods. His poem called "Across the Door" is unsurpassed both in form and imaginative suggestiveness. These lines have upon them the simplicity and inevitability which belong only to great poetry.

With what ease our imagination re-creates the poem's setting—the close interior with the candle light making flickering patterns on the smoke-stained rafters, the quick elbow-movements of the fiddlers, and the young, eager girl who, transported by the music and dance, so soon feels on the moonlit threshold with "the dim, wide meadows" about her, a conscious, bewildered awakening to that wild mystery before which all creation trembles and faints. If Mr. Colum had written no other line of poetry except this piece, in my opinion, it would have ensured for him an undisputed place among the immortals:

The fiddles were playing and playing,
The couples were out on the floor;
From converse and dancing he drew me,
And across the door.

Ah! strange were the dim, wide meadows,
And strange was the cloud-strewn sky,
And strange in the meadows the corncrakes,
And they making cry!

The hawthorn bloom was by us,
Around us the breath of the south.
White hawthorn, strange in the night-time—
His kiss on my mouth!